

# CONSTRUCTION+

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## RETHINKING REFURBISHMENT

CONSERVATION INSIGHTS FROM  
ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING EXPERTS

INAUGURAL CONNECTS DIRECTORY  
FOR CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS





## CONSERVATION CASE STUDY: LINGNAN ANCESTRAL HALLS

By Eric CM Lee, LWK + PARTNERS

Ancestral halls are the architectural expression of a salient social organisation in traditional Chinese society: kinship. Often standing as the most eye-catching and magnificent structure in older villages, ancestral halls are where all the ancestral tablets are worshipped daily, functioning as the central site for uniting the family. It is also the place for recording glorious feats within the clan and performing rituals during festive occasions. However, as time progresses, continued urbanisation and regeneration programmes have brought these important cultural treasures under immense pressure. Deterioration is fast and the need for conservation is imminent.

### ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

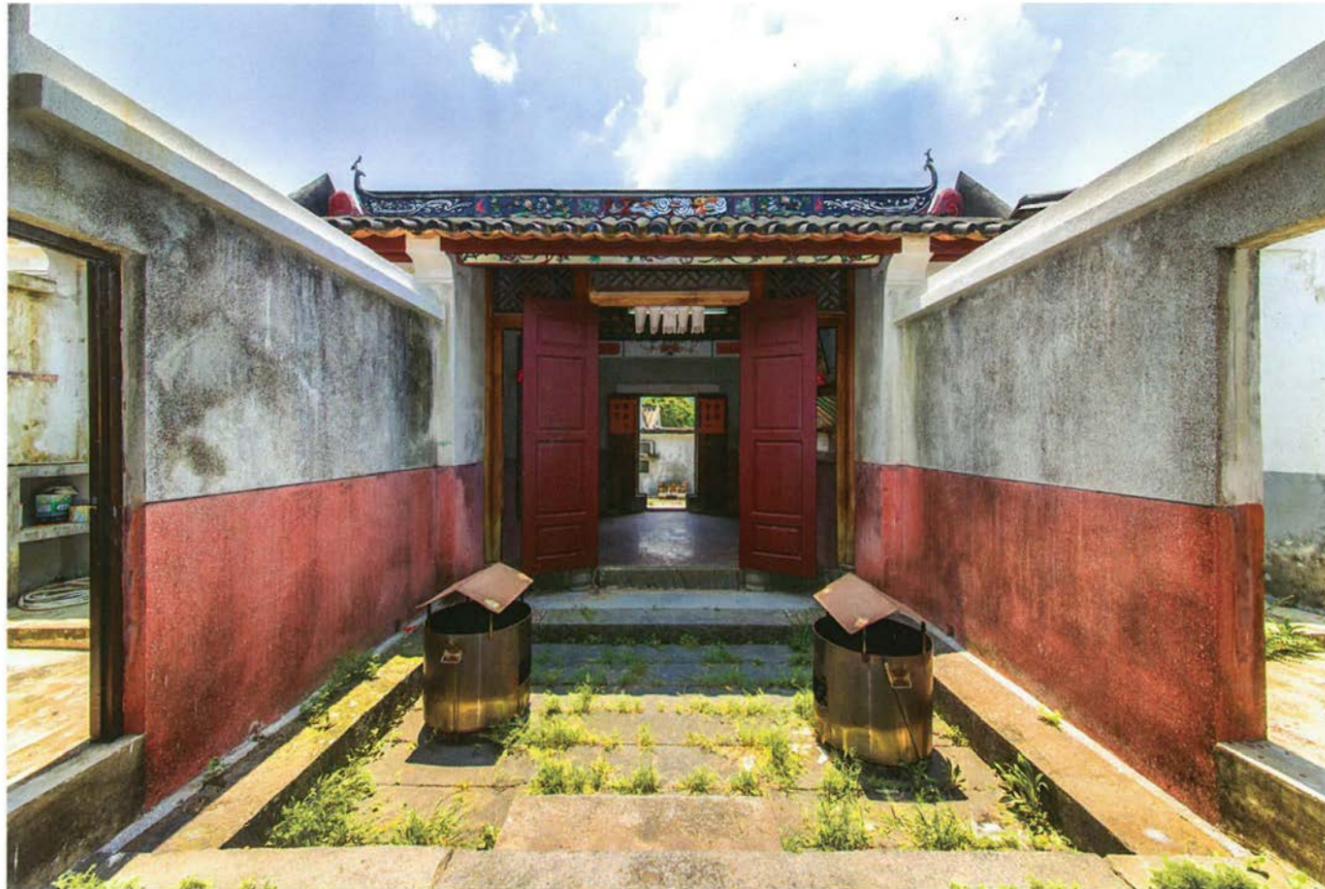
Ancestral halls reflect the customs and architecture of a place. In Hong Kong, they are mainly divided into local and Hakka styles. Local ones are typically built with two-hall-three-bay layouts with one courtyard, or three-hall-three-bay layouts with two

courtyards. For wealthier, more established clans, their buildings are larger and more extensively decorated. By contrast, Hakka ancestral halls are more flexible and dynamic in their layouts, with relatively smaller scale and simple, basic decorations.

Ancestral halls are symmetrically built to

The Middle Hall, where the clan held important discussions and celebratory ceremonies, of the Ancestral Hall of Tsang Tai Uk in Hong Kong contains a set of ceremonial screens of high historical value

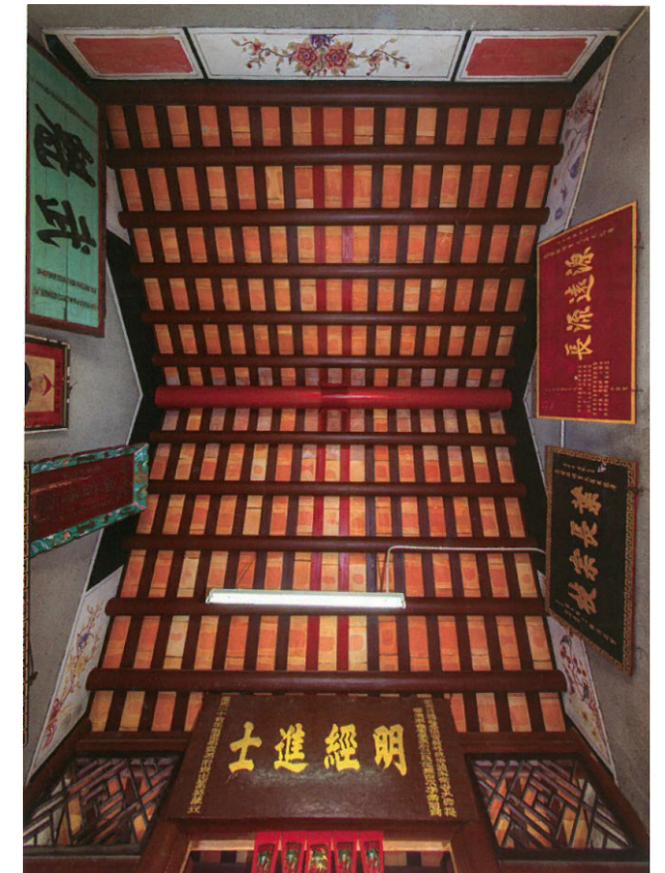
Photo by LWK + PARTNERS



Ip Ancestral Hall in Hong Kong adopts a two-hall-one-bay layout



The front hall's roof of Ip Ancestral Hall has been restored, including the main ridge, gable ridges and fascia boards



## An important principle for restoring old buildings is to use original building materials, techniques and designs as much as possible.

show 'respect for the centre'. The most important spaces are located along the central axis with secondary spaces on both sides, while the left prevails over the right. For building materials, local ancestral halls are mainly built with grey bricks, wood and stone. The facade features grey brick walls and granite columns. As granite was seen as a valuable building material, it was used to draw attention to the facade. The building and materials of Hakka ancestral halls are relatively simple, mainly using grey bricks with rear halls clad in stone walls and rammed earth. Granite is only used in the main door frame.

Ancestral halls are extensively adorned with symbolic wood carvings, murals, plaster mouldings and Shiwan ceramics reflecting the residents' desire for a better life and cultivating moral ideas. These decorations represent various auspicious and moral concepts. Peony for prosperity, and peach for longevity, for example. Some are homophones – 'deer' and 'heron' are pronounced like 'wealth' while 'bottle' resembles 'peace' in Cantonese. Some decorations depict stories from Chinese opera, novels and history, with traditional moral concepts in their themes.



Ip Ancestral Hall's curled roof tips are lavishly decorated with bright-coloured plastered moulding ridges, accentuating the building's solemn dignity



Middle Hall of Ancestral Hall of Tsang Tai Uk, Hong Kong

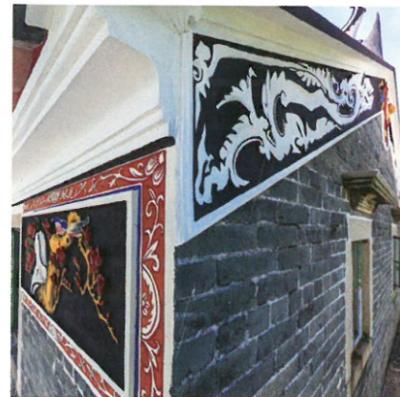
**CHALLENGES OF RESTORING**

An important principle for restoring ancestral halls or old buildings is to use original building materials, techniques and designs as much as possible. However, since these buildings were built long time ago, some craftsmanship has been lost, and materials have been discontinued, especially with the decorations. For instance, Shiwan ceramics, which are commonly used in ancestral halls, are no longer produced in Hong Kong. We could only hire craftsmen in mainland China and have the works delivered to Hong Kong to be installed if needed. Another example is with the grey brick walls severely damaged by natural erosion, which would need large amounts of the original bricks. Local supply is limited and we had to source them from other villages in the New Territories. Unfortunately, it is complicated to find bricks with the matching size.

Since most ancestral halls have not been properly documented or photographed, we can only make estimations about their original appearance based on oral history and do our best to find original materials as far as possible. We should also be extra cautious about adding new elements. Due to the high maintenance cost and various other reasons, the awareness of protecting historical architecture was weak in conventional society causing the lack of conservation efforts with ancestral halls.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVING HISTORICAL BUILDINGS**

Historical buildings have witnessed the cultural development of a place and are valuable social assets for everyone. Conserving built heritage contributes to a city's soft power and boost competitiveness. As part of society's collective memory, historical buildings



The restoration works of Lai Mansion, Hong Kong





Cultural heritage management on the Mandarin's House, Macau, China

**Conserving built heritage contributes to a city's soft power and boost competitiveness. As part of society's collective memory, historical buildings help people understand their past and cultural identity, reinforcing a sense of belonging among residents.**

help people understand their past and cultural identity, reinforcing a sense of belonging among residents. This pushes society forward while creating significant socioeconomic value. Pure economic and urban developments are not enough. Society should take a proactive role to

encourage the conservation, care and respect of historical buildings through integrated planning and regulations. In every city, new and old buildings should coexist in harmony, promoting diversity and sustainable development for a unique urban identity. 



**ERIC CM LEE**  
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CM Lee is an experienced architect with over 20 years of experience in heritage study and conservation for historic buildings. He has a master degree in Architectural Conservation from Hong Kong University and specialises in restoration and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

He has a wide spectrum of working experience in restoration, adaptive re-use, conservation study, archaeological and heritage assessment. Clients served include major local developers, Urban Renewal Authority (URA), churches and convents as well as other commercial and institutional clients.

## 岭南宗祠建筑的修复

宗族是传统中国社会的重要组织，而祠堂就其建筑实体的呈现，往往成为乡土社会中最注目、最宏伟的建筑，凝聚整个宗族。祠堂不但记录着宗族的辉煌事迹与传统，也反映了中国人聚族而居的文化特色，象征着重视传承、团结归一的精神，除了日常供奉祖先牌位，更为重要节日提供祭祀场所。但随着社会的发展，以及旧城改造和城市化运动的影响，宗祠建筑的保护状况并不乐观，损毁和消失的速度惊人。

### 建筑与设计要求

祠堂反映了一个地方的乡风民俗和建筑特色。香港的祠堂主要可分为本地和客家两类，本地祠堂主要是两进三开间一天井形式，但亦有三进三开间两天井的例子。经济能力较强的大族，其祠堂在规模及装饰方面较为优胜。客家祠堂则在布局方面较灵活多变，但规模较小，装饰方面亦较为平实。

空间布局方面，祠堂建筑严谨依从对称的布局，强调以“以中为尊”，位于中轴线上的都是主要建筑空间，两旁为次要空间，又以左边空间为尊，右边空间为卑。用料构造方面，本地祠堂主要以青砖、木材和石材建造。正立面以青砖墙体加上麻石柱筑砌；因麻石是贵重的建筑材料，多使用麻石可强调立面的重要性。客家祠堂的营建与材料则较为简单，它们多以青砖筑砌，后进墙体亦有以散石块及夯土建造，麻石只用于砌筑正门门框。

另外，祠堂经常布满象征性的建筑装饰，例如木刻、彩绘、灰塑、石湾陶瓷等，表达居住者对美好生活的渴求和宣扬道德教育。这些装饰均利用不同的寓意方法象征各种吉祥概念和道德观念，例如牡丹象征富贵、桃代表长寿，亦有透过谐音而得吉祥之意，如“鹿”、“鹭”即“禄”，“瓶”即“平”。部份装饰以戏曲小说和历史故事为题，题材均带有传统的道德观念。

### 修复时面对的挑战

修复祠堂或旧建筑物的其中一个重要原则，是尽量保留建筑的材料、技艺、设计的真实性，但祠堂建造年份久远，有些工艺技术已失传，有些材料也已停产，特别是装饰方面。例如祠堂常见的石湾陶瓷，现时香港已没有相关制作，如需重造都是由内地师傅烧制完成，再送到香港装

嵌。也有处理过侵蚀严重的青砖墙，需要大量青砖来替换，只能到新界其他村寻找，以修复墙身，但要找到相似大小的青砖却很困难。

由于大部分祠堂都没有照片及文献记录，只能从口述历史推敲祠堂的原貌，修复时只能尽量采用原有材料，不会轻言加工创作，每一步都经过深思熟虑。另外，由于维修保养历史建筑费用高昂，旧时社会中保护传统建筑的意识也比较薄弱，种种原因以致祠堂日久失修。

## 保育历史建筑的重要性

历史建筑见证一个地方的文化历史，是宝贵的社会资产。保育历史建筑可以强化城市的文化软实力，促进竞争力。历史建筑作为人民的集体回忆，有助增加当地人民对本地文化及历史认识，强化身份认同感，进而成为社会发展的动力，创造出更显著的经济和社会价值。在追求经济发展、满足城市建设现代化功能需求外，社会也应透过完整的规划与法规，促进历史建筑的保育、爱护和尊重。城市内新旧建筑融合，能促进城市多元化及可持续性发展，各自展现出独一无二的大都会魅力。